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AUTHOR Condon, Elaine C.
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ABSTRACT

This paper makes a case for bi-culturative education as part of English-as-a-second-language programs. This calls for systematically teaching alternatives to the native cultural patterns which are acceptable in American society. Knowledge and practice of specific cultural interference patterns would enable the learner to function adequately in two cultural contexts and, at the same time, to choose freely between behavioral alternatives. Cultural context in this case refers to learning the typical American culture patterns and includes such potential points of conflict as the expression of an inappropriate thought, the use of an inappropriate gesture, the choice of an inappropriate term, the practice of inappropriate behavior, or the manifestation of an inappropriate reaction. Space-time orientation is proposed as a new approach to the interpretation and teaching of cross-cultural differences in the classroom. It can be shown, for example, how this orientation varies among the American, the French, and the Hispanic cultures. It is vital in implementing such a program to avoid any attempt to rob students of their own culture patterns and replace them with one's own. Instead, the teacher introduces an additional set of patterns which the student can use while maintaining his identity and self-respect. Teachers trained for such an approach and materials designed for such a program are as yet rather scarce, and, thus, a drastic change in the contextual quality of ESL classes should not be anticipated for some time. (Author/HW)

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TEACHING THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF ESL CLASSES

Paper presented by:

Dr. E. C. Condon, Director
Language-Culture Institute
Rutgers Graduate School of Education
New Brunswick, New Jersey

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TEACHING THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF ESL CLASSES

There is a story about a cat-and-mouse which illustrates cleverly the conditions of effective interaction between members of two different "cultures":

> A mother mouse and her baby were scampering across a polished floor when they heard a noise. They hoped it would be a human being, but it turned out to be the family cat. Upon seeing the mice, the cat gave chase. Mama Mouse felt a swipe of paw and claw. She turned in her tracks and called out in her loudest voice: "Bow-wow!" The cat ran off. Gathering her baby to her, and catching her breath, Mama Mouse explained, "Now, my child, you see how important a second language is."[1]

What the tale really demonstrates is that crosscultural communication entails more than mere linguistic skills, it also requires a certain familiarity with the way of life associated with the foreign idiom. In such situations, the speaker's success in conveying his message and, conversely, that of the listener in decoding it, are predicated upon a mutual knowledge of such culturally-conditioned factors as the interlocutor's ways of thinking, feeling and behaving. In the case of our victorious mouse, the contextual data underlying the use of the key expression, "bow-wow," may be described as a behavioral sequence triggered by the appropriate cue:

> Cue: "Bow-wow!"
>
> Behavioral Sequence (cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains)
>
> Feline cognitive pattern: "Bow-wow" = dog = enemy
> Feline affective pattern: dog = danger = fear
> Feline psychomotor pattern: dog = panic = flight

Although these non-linguistic factors are part and parcel of all acts of communication, they are not usually acknowledged

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[1] Readers Digest, March 1973, p. 88.

consciously, except in occasional remarks, such as: "It's not what he said, but how he said it." Their existence does become noticeable, however, in the negative reactions which characterize interactions between representatives of different communities, who are bilingual but not bicultural. Under these conditions, misunderstandings are apt to be triggered by a variety of culturally inappropriate stimuli, such as those illustrated in the following examples:

1. Expression of "inappropriate" thought:

   For example, the Turkish student's faux-pas who "insulted" his American hostess at a social gathering, by "complimenting" her (in perfect English) on her corpulence--a remark which, in his native land, would carry dual praise: a direct expression of appreciation for feminine pulchritude, and an indirect expression of regard for the economic achievement of the lady's husband, evidenced by her cared-for appearance.

2. Use of "inappropriate" gesture:

   For example, the inadvertent "insult" conveyed to a Vietnamese host by an American guest who casually crosses one knee over the other, thereby pointing one foot toward his interlocutor, a strictly taboo gesture in that culture.

3. Choice of "inappropriate" term:

   For example, the UN interpreter's erroneous translation of the innocuous statement: "je demande . . . (I ask)" into a peremptory declaration: "I demand . . ." which, given in the explosive context of the Gaullist era, touched off automatically a flock of antagonistic reactions.

4. Practice of "inappropriate" behavior:

   For example, the newly arrived Columbian maid's innocent but ill-advised attempt to wash dishes under cold, running water, as it is the custom in her native land, . . . much to the horror of her American employer who immediately visualizes a proliferation of germs on her dinnerware.

5. Manifestation of "inappropriate" reaction:

   For example, the American businessman's anger at being kept "cooling his heels" for an hour beyond his appoint-

> ment time in a Latin American country, where such a waiting period is as normal as a five to ten minute delay in the USA.

The victim of such mishaps may find sufficient fortitude within himself to laugh at his cultural blunders, if the latter occur during a temporary visit on foreign soil or rarely enough to prevent the destruction of his sense of security in functioning within an alien society. Unfortunately, this does not apply to non-English speakers in this country, who find it impossible to retain a sense of humor while struggling against the initial trauma of culture shock and against the constant erosion of a culture fatigue induced by tensions in handling unfamiliar cues of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor behaviors (in addition to the problems of linguistic communication in day-to-day interaction).

Against these inevitable circumstances of daily problem-solving for survival in an alien environment, the stranger carries no other protection than a desire to "belong," a willingness to learn, a determination to succeed, and a fund of inner resources determined by his individual personality. In order to be accepted by the host society, he must conform to its accepted standards of living, a goal which may be achieved through one of two processes: acculturation, an acceptance of the dominant life style at the expense of one's own, or bi-culturation, an assimilation of new patterns of living as alternatives to native ways of existence. In most cases, the immigrant becomes unwillingly acculturated or pseudo-acculturated, or he resists this cultural engulfment passively, through withdrawal into an ethnic enclave, or actively, through militancy. Occasionally, however, a rare individual

succeeds in coming to terms with the often conflicting dictates of his native and adopted lands, through biculturalism or the development of parallel sets of behaviors, akin to the companion linguistic networks evolved in coordinate bilingualism, which enables him to function equally effectively in two cultural contexts.

But, the road to such balanced biculturalism is long and arduous; it is also far too complex to be explored readily by anyone who, as is mostly the case for non-English speakers, must be primarily concerned with the problems of daily survival. Yet, there can be no real survival for a man, beyond mere physical subsistence, unless he is able to retain that which defines him as a member of society--his cultural identity and his self respect. And it is precisely this entity which becomes destroyed in the process of acculturation, though it may be retained in its entirety, in the course of bi-culturation.

For many decades in the past history of American immigration, the schools seemed to have concerned themselves solely with the "Americanization" of all prospective citizens through traditional instruction in the English language, in citizenship and in "survival skills" (a conglomerate of information on the concrete aspects of life in the United States, such as government housing, social services, individual rights and responsibilities, and the like). It is only recently that they have begun to venture into such novel fields as ESL and bilingual education while, nevertheless, leaving the "citizenship and survival skills areas"

virtually unchanged, with occasional exceptions found in imaginative programs and classrooms handled by creative educators.

At the present time, however, an innovative approach to cultural instruction in ESL classes is being implemented in two state projects funded under the Adult Education Act. It is based on the principle of "bi-culturative education," an instructional model initially conceptualized at the Rutgers University Graduate School of Education, and designed to produce teachers skilled in bicultural understanding and teaching, as well as bicultural learners able to function effectively in the native and target environments. This dual program is carried out simultaneously on two levels: a theoretical or informational level, which is devoted to the preparation of a programed teacher training module in cross-cultural understanding, and sponsored by the Bureau of Basic Continuing Education in Albany, New York; and a practical, or experiential level, which is applied to the development of instructional techniques and materials of bi-culturative education, based on the training module, practiced in summer and follow-up workshops, and sponsored by the Bureau of Adult Basic Education in Trenton, New Jersey.[I] The coordination of these efforts is insured through the involvement of key individuals on the Rutgers Language-Culture Institute staff in both aspects of the project.

[I]The New York project, directed by Robert Poszic, is funded by Section 309B (Special Programs) of the Adult Education Act Title III; Project Officer Mr. James Parker.

The New Jersey project, the Language-Culture Institute, Rutgers Graduate School of Education, directed by Dr. E. C. Condon, was sponsored by Mr. George Snow, director of Adult Basic Education and funded under Section 309c of the Adult Education Act Title III, (as part of the Regional Staff Development Program, directed by Dr. Vince de Sanctis; Project Officer, Dr. Grace Hewell.)

The foundations of these programs in bi-culturative education may be visualized as resting upon the following concepts:

1. The inseparability of language and culture (in life, as well as in classroom situations.)
2. The existence of a hidden structure in any given culture, paralleling that of linguistic expression.
3. The need to eliminate cultural barriers between dominant society and other groups in the United States.
4. The need to provide instruction to foster biculturalism, as well as bilingualism.
5. The need to provide teachers with means of instruction in "total communication" (linguistic and cultural).

Within this framework, the objectives are to sensitize educators to cultural pluralism and to problems arising from cultural differences, to inform them on the nature and extent of these cultural implications, to help them recognize dominant patterns of life in American society, and to show them how to impart their cultural awareness, knowledges and skills to the learners. For this purpose, a new method of interpreting and teaching cultural differences, devised by the director, is being tested at the Language-Culture Institute. It is based on the principle of Space-Time Orientation, a theory which relates the structure of a given cultural system to the specific orientation of its members in the dimensions of time and space, its reflection in the language, and its externalization throughout the network of human relationships with the physical, social, and metaphysical environment, and the self. This outlook on culture may be illustrated quite simply by contrasting briefly some of the major characteristics of the American, French and Hispanic ways of life.

As a point of departure, one must realize that the human

concepts of time and space, which we all take for granted as universal dimensions, vary considerably from one society to another. American people, for instance are apt to be obsessive about time, as may be seen from the importance attached to time schedules, time-saving devices and wasted time, and the abundance of "time" expressions in the language, such as "time payments," "lead time," or "Number one man." On the other hand, their attitude toward space seems rather casual, as may be noted from the free access to private property, unrestricted by fences, from the open road effect of city plans organized in a grid system, and from the territorial freedom accorded to children, all of which exemplify a reaction to spatial constraints well illustrated in the words of a song: "Don't Fence Me In," and in the multiplicity of terms for high-speed roadways found within the language itself. In addition, the average American tends to orient himself spatiotemporarily in the world, according to patterns of dynamic diffusion: he is action-prone (with a psychomotor dominance expressed by the typical admonishing,"Don't stand there, DO something!"), inclined toward mobility (geographical, social, and economic), predisposed to change and confident in the future.

While American people are, on the whole, ruled by a time-stressed tempo of existence, Frenchmen are likely, instead, to stress the importance of spatial definition. This tendency is reflected in the strict zoning system of private space--the home--where strangers are seldom invited, in the predilection for walls and fences around properties, and the precise determination of a child's biosphere in the home, the garden, and the neighbor-

hood. Conversely, the French outlook on time is characterized by flexibility, for every moment filled with any form of human activity is considered worthwhile, whether it be devoted to cooking or eating, planning or tinkering, talking or thinking. There is no deep awareness of tempus fugit, no sense of urgency in enjoying life's passing gifts in France, where everyone practices his individual art of living. Space, on the other hand, tends to be carefully delimited in all aspects of French life, from the careful delineation of social boundaries, to that of private property by means of fences, and to the precise definition of individual roles and responsibilities in society. From a Gestalt viewpoint, the French handling of reality in time and space may be seen as defined by patterns of static centralism, identifiable in their analytical approaches to reality (with a cognitive dominance verbalized centuries ago by Descartes in his famous statement: "Je pense, donc je suis."), their fanatic insistence on individualism, their cautious stance toward life in general, and their realistic use of the past to draw lessons for the proper conduct of the present and planning of the future.

In contrast with the time-stressed orientation of American culture, and the space-stressed direction of French culture, the Hispanic sense of time and space can only be described as neutral, since it assigns precedence to interpersonal relationships over all such dimensional abstractions. This viewpoint is reflected in all aspects of Spanish life, from the organization of central space (the plaza) in towns and cities to facilitate human interaction (the town plans of Guatemala City, San Salvador, Panama City, and Mexico City with its huge Zocalo, among others), to the subjugation of time to

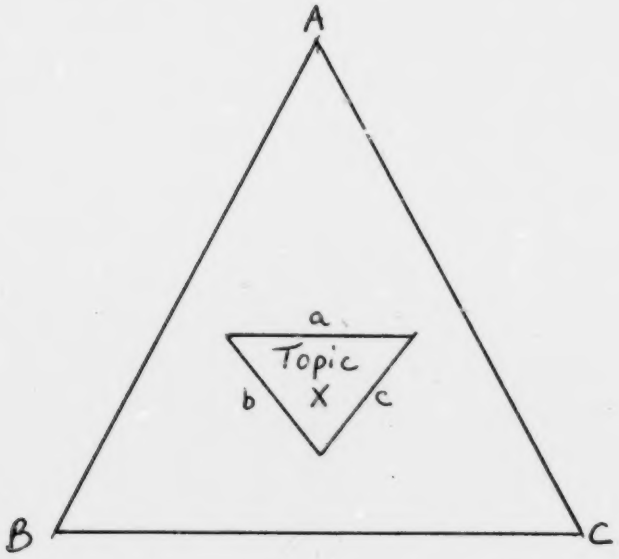
human considerations (what is referred to as the "mañana syndrome" by many an exasperated American). It is also illustrated in the extraordinary sense of courtesy conveyed by the Spanish language in daily interchanges, which bespeaks a deep deference to humanity, as may be noted in the sentence "Me explico bien?" (where the speaker assumes the burden of responsibility for being understood by his interlocutor), or in the personal connotation of "conocer" ("knowing," rather than the more impersonal "meeting") in the stereotyped greeting: "Mucho gusto en conocerle," or even in the existence of several personal pronouns for the second person "tu, Vd., Vds., vosotros," as means of expressing sensitivity to others, in contrast with that of a single term, "Yo" for the self. On the whole, then, the Spanish view of the universe may be visualized as governed by spatiotemporal patterns of passive relationalism, which are manifested in a reactive handling of day-to-day existence (with an affective dominance symbolized in such expressions as "tener corazon"), a strong sense of personal and familistic values, a fatalistic acceptance of life experiences, and a capacity to share with others the passing moments of joy and sorrow.

The very presence of divergences in cultural orientations, such as those we have just briefly described in the previous paragraphs, should suffice to explain the frequency of inter-group misunderstandings whenever members of different societies have an opportunity to exchange ideas on any given topic. In any business discussion which brings together a Frenchman, an American, and a Spaniard, for instance, each man will address himself naturally to that particular facet of the subject which his native inclination causes

him to single out as most important. Thus, the first individual will tend to emphasize mostly the cognitive factors of the issue, the second, its psychomotor aspects, and the third, its affective components. But, in the process, each interlocutor also minimizes those very elements of the conversation which are held consequential by the others. The end product of such an encounter will probably be a three-way communication breakdown in the interchange of ideas, with each person blaming the others for their thoughtlessness and lack of comprehension:

> The Spaniard, who cares about the human relationships involved in the discussion, is offended by the American display of "unseemly" haste in "getting down to business," and by the French preoccupation with a "cold-blooded" dissection of facts.
>
> The Frenchman, who values orderly, in-depth planning, is irritated by the "childish impulsiveness" of the American's style of discussion, and by the "illogical emotionalism" of the Spaniard's comments.
>
> The American, who prizes expediency and action above anything else, is exasperated by the "wasted" time spent by the Spaniard on the"irrelevant points" and by the Frenchman on "hairsplitting issues."

Since none of these reactions are discussed by the three interlocutors, the latter will part company, dissatisfied with the outcome of their discussion, but completely unaware of its primary cause--the restricted area of common cultural meaning actually shared by them in the process of communication. The extent of this polarity problem in tricultural communication is illustrated below in a diagram which shows its limiting effect on the quality and quantity of information shared by an American, a French, and a Spanish speaker in face to face interaction.

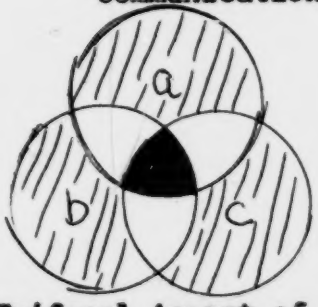


Tripolar Communication

A: American Speaker
B: French Speaker
C: Spanish Speaker

X: Topic of Communication

a: Psychomotor Aspect of X
b: Cognitive Aspect of X
c: Affective Aspect of X



Trifocal Aspect of X

a: Psychomotor Focus of X
b: Cognitive Focus of X
c: Affective Focus of X

■ : Triculturally common areas
□ : Biculturally common areas
▨ : Monocultural areas

FIGURE 7

Polarity of Tricultural Communication

Two unfortunate consequences of differentiated world-views are that men tend to be chauvinistic concerning their own way of existence, and to react negatively toward "strange" modes of living. Thus, they interpret any behavior which does not conform to their own life style as "contrary to human nature," without realizing that the latter is not intrinsic to mankind, but is, instead, culturally conditioned and, therefore, variable. To the average citizen of any country, most immigrants are people who dress, speak and act in "funny, unnatural" ways, and who are not really accepted into the dominant society until they harmonize with the rest of society in appearance, speech, and deed. And popular reaction to such outsiders has been and still is no different in the United States where each successive wave of newcomers has suffered the pangs of in-group rejection and acculturation in their bid for full scale citizenship (de jure and de facto) in their host country.

While it is quite true that the language barrier represents a major hurdle for foreign speakers to overcome in their attempts to participate fully in community life, it is equally evident that cultural dissonance also serves as a deterrent to the attainment of this goal. As we have seen earlier in several examples, bilingual knowledge alone cannot insure the effectiveness and accuracy of crosscultural communication . . . which may be destroyed by the simple use of an inappropriate gesture, or thought, or emotion. Ironically, linguistic fluency may even guarantee a greater level of misunderstanding, since the listener "naturally"--but erroneously--expects someone who speaks like a native to behave like one as well! Under the circumstances, it seems equally imperative for a

stranger to learn the ways of living of his adopted country--the patterns of thought, feeling, and behaving--as it is for him to master its means of expression--the language and its culturally conditioned kinesic and para-linguistic auxiliaries--in order to survive in society. What remains to be determined is in what way this dual objective of bilingualism-biculturalism may best be accomplished under present-day conditions.

In retrospect, the sink-or-swim melting pot concept which dominated the American immigration scene in the past is an outmoded policy based upon two outmoded principles--the assumption that total cultural immersion would in time produce Americanization, and the conviction that total Americanization would be a "good thing" for all aliens. But today, in an enlightened era of international involvement, concern for individual rights, and search for relevance in an expansion of accelerated change, this method of assimilation is not only a waste of human potential--those near-citizens who live on the fringe of our affluent society--but it is also contrary to the democratic ethics of self-determination and pluralism. It is no longer justifiable, for it is founded on the process of acculturation, a practice which must be equated with the destruction of a person's ethnic heritage and, more often than not, to the mutilation of his identity and his self-concept. The only viable alternative to this evil must then be found in a system which will provide for adaptation to, and acceptance into the host society while allowing for the retention of native culture.

A possible solution to this dilemma may be arrived at in the teaching of bi-culturation which will enable an individual to

shift from one mode of behavior to another in response to environmental cues. But, given the circumstances we have just described above, it is quite clear that the responsibility for nurturing the seeds of biculturalism cannot rest haphazardly either with the foreign individual, or with society at large, since neither can be said to possess the necessary knowledge and means to select, and reinforce the learning of, appropriate cultural information and skills. Quite logically, of course, the task belongs to the realm of education and,more specifically, to that of language instruction where the concept of "total communication" may be implemented within the framework of ESL learning experiences.

Under these conditions, the role of the ESL specialist reaches far beyond mere linguistic concerns and information on American institutions; it must extend into the spheres of cultural awareness, interpretation and instruction. Such an endeavour does, of course, bring to the classroom a new set of problems inherent to the subject matter and human factors. Some of the questions which come immediately to mind in this respect are:

1. What is the definition of "culture" in practical classroom terms?
2. What are the cultural knowledges and skills required by ESL learners at different age levels, to survive in American society? What is biculturalism?
3. What professional information and materials are available on culture in general, and specific cultures in particular, to the ESL teacher?
4. What training, if any, is needed by teachers to carry out bicultural instruction?
5. What are the major difficulties to be anticipated in the implementation of bi-culturative education?

The task of providing an answer to these questions is of such

magnitude that it will require a great deal of time and effort, on the part of concerned individuals at all educational levels and in subject matter fields related to the language area, to produce the required data and to carry out the necessary experimentation. But, in the meantime, it would seem practical to set out some preliminary guidelines (related to the previous queries) for the implementation of biculturative education. The following suggestions may be of some assistance in this respect:

1. Culture in ESL instruction should deal with the American way of life as it is exemplified in the behavioral patterns of the dominant group (middle class society) which prevail in academic, social and economic circles, and which will determine the learner's success in his struggle for survival in an alien society. It should stress the total context of daily communication within American institutions.

2. Cultural knowledges include the concrete manifestations of American life, such as government, social or welfare institutions, as well as explicit rules of behavior, such as common courtesy, work ethics, or social function etiquette, and implicit factors of interaction, such as expectations in ways of feeling, thinking, and reacting. The cultural skills associated with these knowledges entail the ability to match automatically appropriate, "American-style" patterns of behavior (linguistic, cognitive, affective and psychomotor) with common, everyday situations. Biculturalism may be equated with competence in functioning effectively in two cultural contexts, while retaining one's own identity and heritage. It is predicated upon a free choice between behavioral alternatives (native and American behaviors), based on a full cognizance and acceptance of the consequences of this choice.

3. Professional information and materials on the cultural context of ESL instruction are rather scarce at the present time, but they should be forthcoming from such research centers as the University of Hawaii, the Mutual Cultural and Educational Exchange Program of the Department of State, Ford Foundation programs on Intergroup Relations and Urban problems, and the Language-Culture Institute of the Rutgers Graduate School of Education. Meanwhile, general reference data may be derived from publications in anthropology, sociology, psychology, and minority group education, some of which are listed in the attached bibliography.

4. Training in bi-culturative education is essential for ESL teachers who must develop an awareness and acceptance of the legitimacy of other life styles, gain insight into what constitutes the national character of the average American and into the bases of intercultural relations within the American context, and acquire the pedagogical skills needed to identify cultural interference points and to plan learning experiences, designed to teach bicultural behaviors in these selected areas of interaction conflicts. The staff development activities devised by the Peace Corps for their volunteer programs may serve as an excellent model for personnel training in human relations; they include such innovative techniques as culture assimilators, mini-dramas, seeding dialogues, case methods, and videotape confrontations which could be easily applied to both ESL teacher preparation and to classroom instruction.

5. Bi-culturative education may be defined as the deliberate teaching of American patterns of behavior as alternatives to, but not in replacement of, native ways of living in the context of ESL instruction. Its implementation may be expected to encounter these five major problems:

   a. Human Resistance to Change: It will be difficult for both teachers and learners to overcome their natural ethnocentric tendencies and to accept the legitimacy of other life styles.

   b. Complexity of Culture: For the development of curriculum materials in bi-culturative education, it will be necessary to take into consideration the multiplicity of cultural variations which are present in any society (geographical, socioeconomic, occupational, chronological, individual, and the like), as well as the ongoing phenomenon of change as it affects all aspects of community existence. Caution will also be required in the teaching of "average American" behaviors to avoid conveying the false impression that such patterns are always exhibited by all US citizens everywhere in the country. Pluralism and diversity will also have to be stressed, along with the notion that these national characteristics represent a network of cultural traits which, in that particular combination, are found more often in our society than in any other group.

   c. Scarcity of Basic Information: In view of the recency of this educational innovation, it will be difficult at first to secure reference and instructional data on cultural awareness, conflicts, knowledges and skills which are directly applicable to the classroom situation. Most of the immediately available information will be fragmentary and general in nature and, until publications reach the commercial market, there may be duplication of efforts in materials preparation in different parts of the country.

d. Time Lag in Professional Preparation: There are very few practicing specialists in cultural instruction who are able to train teachers in methods and materials of bi-culturative education; and there are even fewer ESL teachers who are ready to implement such a program in the schools. Under the circumstances, drastic changes in the contextual quality of ESL classes should not be realistically anticipated for some time.

e. "Specialist" Syndrome: Experts in psychology, sociology, anthropology and other fields related to language education may express concern over this attempt, on the part of educators, to teach concepts (such as national character) on which they, themselves, do not always agree. Undoubtedly, there is much to learn in this area, but there is sufficient information on problems of acculturation, conflicts, and discrimination, as well as on "typical" American behavior, to convince classroom practitioners that they must seek practical ways of minimizing the effect of ethnocentrism through preventive cultural education. And, in this case, the pragmatic viewpoint far outweighs theoretical considerations, even though it may invite criticism from certain circles.

In light of these factors, it would be clearly unrealistic to expect an overnight implementation of bi-culturative education in our schools. But, until such time as we are able to establish an ideal cultural context for ESL instruction, we can no longer overlook the problems experiences by the learners in adjusting their personal life style to the unfamiliar perspectives of an alien society. The least we can do is to withhold judgement on patterns of interaction which may seem puzzling to us, and to attempt to reach beyond cultural barriers for the achievement of common grounds of understanding with each individual.

If, in conclusion, any single recommendation may be extended to ESL educators for the development of productive intercultural relationships within the classroom, it is to remind them of the common bonds of humanity which unite all members of the human race, regardless of their cultural affiliation, and of the common needs of all living beings for personal warmth and approval. For, the brotherhood

of mankind is a reality which cannot be denied, and the qualities which are most likely to strike a response within the heart of those who have lost all they held dear and near in their native land, are not so much those of impersonal, academic excellence and generosity, as those of human kindness, acceptance, and understanding. Without these very special gifts, the most skillful of teachers will be unable to eliminate the intellectual and emotional obstacles which prevent the foreign speaker from accepting an alternate way of life and tradition. And, as a result of this failure, he will miss the greatest reward which any educator may ever reap--the joy of witnessing the metamorphosis of a confused and insecure "foreign" learner into a confident and well-adjusted human being--a bicultural American by choice, and not by desperation.

Dr. E. C. Condon, Director
Language-Culture Institute
Rutgers Graduate School of
Education
New Brunswick, New Jersey

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